

Concept of Sins in Islam (part 2 of 3)

Description: These lessons will introduce the reader to sins, their types, severity, how forgiveness is attained for them, and how they will affect a person in the life to come.

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Objectives:

- To learn the definition of major and minor sins.
- To learn if and when major sins make a person a disbeliever.
- To learn how major sins are forgiven.
- To learn the fate of a person who dies with unforgiven major sins.
- To learn the number of major sins.
- To learn when minor sins turn into major sins.

Arabic Terms:

- *Kaba'ir* (sing. *kabirah*) – major sins.
- *Saghair* (sing. *saghirah*) – minor sins.
- *Shirk* – a word that implies ascribing partners to Allah, or ascribing divine attributes to other than Allah, or believing that the source of power, harm and blessings comes from another besides Allah.
- *Sunnah* – The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.
- *Tawbah* – repentance.
- *Tawheed* – The Oneness and Uniqueness of Allah with respect to His Lordship, His Names and Attributes and in His right to be worshipped.

With respect to their severity, sins are categorized into major and minor sins. Major sins are called *kaba'ir* (sing. *kabirah*) and are mentioned in Quran 4:131, 42:37, 53:32. Minor sins, or *saghair* (sing. *saghirah*) are mentioned in Quran 18:49. All deeds, including major and minor sins, are recorded and these records will be given to the individual on the Day of Judgment (Quran 18:49, 54:2-3).



Definition of Major Sins[1]

Any sin for which the Quran or *Sunnah* prescribes a punishment in this world such as for murder, adultery, and theft; or about which there is a threat of Allah's anger and punishment in the Hereafter, as well as anything whose perpetrator has been cursed by our Prophet.

Definition of a Minor Sin

A minor sin is every sin that does not have a prescribed punishment for this life or a threat attached to it in the Hereafter.

Do Major Sins Make a Person a Disbeliever?

Sins damage faith by reducing it. A Muslim's faith reduces in proportion to the amount of his sins. Nevertheless, neither major, nor minor sins eradicate faith completely. A sin does not turn a Muslim into a non-believer unless the person believes the sin to be permissible. He might deem a sin permissible either because he stubbornly refuses to acknowledge that Allah has forbidden it or he doubts the prophethood of Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him. In either case, when a sin is tantamount to denying the Quran and rejecting Prophet Muhammad the doer of that sin steps into disbelief without even doing the sin. For example, if a person insists that Allah has allowed fornication, while they know it is forbidden in the Quran, that person turns into an disbeliever. Otherwise, we do not consider people to become non-Muslims on account of a sin they commit.

The proof that a person who commits a sin is considered Muslim is found in the Quran and Prophetic Traditions:

1. The Quran says:

“Verily, Allah forgives not that partners should be set up with him in worship but He will forgive whoever He wishes for anything besides that.” (Quran 4:48)

2. Whoever dies without committing *shirk* with Allah shall enter Paradise.[2]

3. A person who believes in *Tawheed* will enter Paradise even if he fornicates and steals. [\[3\]](#)

There was an alcoholic in the time of the Prophet. One time when he was punished, a Muslim cursed him. The Prophet forbade that Muslim from cursing that Companion and he said: 'Do not curse him, for by Allah, he loves Allah and His Messenger.'[\[4\]](#) Due to his belief in Allah and His Prophet, the major sin that he was doing did not wipe out all his faith.

How Are Major Sins Forgiven?

Major sin can be forgiven by the following ways:

- a) Through sincere repentance, which entails leaving the sin, having remorse for performing it, and resolving to never perform it again. If the sin involves wrongdoing towards others, then in addition to the above, he must also restore their rights or property or seek their forgiveness.

When Allah sees this sincere repentance from one of His slaves - a slave who truly turns to his Lord in fear and hope - He not only *forgives* the sin, but *replaces* those sins for good deeds to the slave's credit. This is from Allah's infinite grace and mercy. Allah says this right after mentioning the sins of *shirk*, murder, and adultery, He says: "Except those who repent and believe, and do righteous deeds, for those, Allah will change their sins into good deeds, and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (Quran 25:70) This blessing is only for one who has faith, whose repentance is sincere, and who strives to work righteous deeds.

- b) By Allah's pure grace, generosity, and favor. Allah may therefore forgive whomsoever He wills without that individual having actually repented.
- c) By the performance of certain acts, like *Hajj*, according to some scholars.

Fate of a Person Who Dies Committing Major Sins

A person who dies from an unrepented major sin is at Allah's discretion in the Hereafter. If Allah wants, He may punish him first according to his sins and then enter him into Paradise. Allah may also simply forgive him and enter him into Paradise directly without any punishment.[\[5\]](#)

Examples of Major Sins

Some of the major sins of the heart are pride, hypocrisy, to despair of God's mercy and feel secure from the divine plan, greed, and envy.

Some of the major sins of the tongue are lying, making false promises, speaking without knowledge, slandering chaste women, boasting, and ridiculing others.

Other major sins include racism (reviling other people's race), bribery, disobeying parents, breaking ties with relatives, harming the neighbor, mistreating animals, taking drugs and alcoholic beverages, fornication, and stealing.

Relation Between Minor & Major Sins & Number of Major Sins

How many major sins are there? They range from four to seven hundred. A work on major sins by a famous scholar, Imam Adh-Dhahabi, lists 70. Imam Haytami, another scholar, describes around 476 major sins. The famous companion of Prophet Muhammad, Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, said that major sins are “closer to 700 than they are to seven, except that no sin is ‘major’ when forgiveness is sought for it (that is when one undertakes proper repentance (*tawbah*)), just as no sin is ‘minor’ if one persists in it.”

[\[6\]](#)

Minor sins can become major by:

- Persistence and repetition.
- Belittling the sin.
- Celebrating the sin and taking pride in it.
- Announcing the sin and telling it to others.

Endnotes:

[\[1\]](#) *Al-Kabair* by al-Dhahabi tahqiq Muhi ud Din Mistu, p. 36

[\[2\]](#) *Saheeh Muslim*

[\[3\]](#) *Saheeh Muslim*

[\[4\]](#) *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

[\[5\]](#) *Shar Aqeeda al-Wasitiyya*, Khalil a-Harras, p. 190-192

[\[6\]](#) *Mukhtasar Minhaj ul-Qasideen*, p. 257

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